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1913



CHICAGO TONGUE

BY
ELBERT HUBBARD
(FRM ELBERTVS)



THE · ROY·CROFTERS
EAST · AURORA · ERIE · COUNTY · N.Y.



"INDOS HISTORICAL SURVEY



AS WRITTEN BY
FRA ELBERTUS
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The Ballade of Dead Knockers

By Michael Conahan

Nemo me impune lacessit: "No one hammers me with impunity."

Now this was the Chant I heard them rant
When a sudden coolness slid
Down Hell's concave, and a solace gave
To each gentleman on his grid.
From each sprite in bale came a gruesome wail,
As the madd'ning chorus spread;
And they sang a song that was loud and long—
The Ballade of Knockers dead.

"Oho for the Hand that 's light and bland
The Hammer to swing, sans fear,
On the Cerebrum or the Tympanum
Or the Knot behind the Ear!
Not a wound shall tell how the thing befell,
When the whimpering Soul has fled,
And the crowner's quest shall guess the rest—"
Here chortled the Knockers dead.

“’T is a delicate joy and a sweet employ
 To rive the Fool from his breath,
But a finer Art than the Thugs impart
 Was ours, and the Second Death!
For the Game we stalked in freedom walked,
 Nor dreamed that his pathway led
To the coup de grace that leaves no trace—
 Hurrah for us Knockers dead!

For this is the Work that none may shirk,
 And thus does the sentence run,
That One shall believe and One deceive
 ’Till the human web be spun.
Yea, a man shall smile, heart-free from guile,
 On him who his life may shed;
Nor shall he say Nay, though the Slayer slay—”
 Applause from the Knockers dead.

And many 's the Wight on earth tonight
That sleeps without a fear
For his Cerebrum or his Tympanum
Or the Knot behind the Ear.
But well we know when the mystic blow
From the Hammer's helve is sped ;
And the exquisite Jest brings balm and rest
To the Souls of the Knockers dead.

“Let the worldling sing of an idle thing,
The faith of the marriage-tie :
And the Dotard bland of the gentle hand
He will clasp till Death come nigh—
But the Kiss that kills and the hand that stills
The Fool in a sleep of lead,
Are doing their work sans let or shirk—
Ho! ho!” laughed the Knockers dead.

“But of all that fall ’neath the silent Mall—
A number that knows no end—
The spiciest draught our souls have quaffed
Is the Friend unto his Friend!
He leadeth him on till doubt be gone
And love hath his bosom fed,
Then he yerketh him here behind the Ear!”
Loud yammered the Knockers dead.

So this was the Chant I heard them rant
When a sudden coolness slid
Down Hell’s hot spine, like a healing wine
To each gentleman on his grid.
And I knew in sooth they had sung the truth,
Though I shrank from its meaning dread—
That Knockers are most till they yield the ghost,
And the rest are Knockers dead!

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Arise, my God, and strike, for we hold Thee just,
Strike dead the whole weak race of venomous worms
That sting each other here in the dust.

—Tennyson.



WILLIAM T. STEAD once wrote some things about Chicago. Some of the items he penned were not wholly complimentary. The intense activity of the place, in the opinion of Mr. Stead, had evolved a certain impatience and often an ungenerous quality of mind that revealed itself in heresy-trials, divorce-mills, political fights where aldermen defied judges, judges defied the legislature, and legislators in turn challenged the governors. To the English visitor the newspapers were unnecessarily busy with charges, accusations and indictments,

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and everywhere, even in parlors, scandal, defamation and vituperation seemed to abound.

"Chicago averages a murder a day, not counting all those who are done to death by Chicago Tongue," said Mr. Stead.

Israel Zangwill, countryman and friend of Mr. Stead, visiting Chicago some time after, was escorted about the city by a Committee to See the Sights. Among other places of interest he was taken to the Stockyards, where luncheon was served for the party. During the meal a Pert Miss, seated next to the guest of honor, asked him this question: "Mr. Zangwill, how do you like Chicago Ham?"

The Dreamer of the Ghetto raised his sorrowful face and quietly said, "I like it, I like it—much better than Chicago Tongue!"

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A thousand years before Christ, Solomon said some wholesome truths about this matter of Tongue. It is doubtful whether he had any prophetic vision of the Chicago article, and really there is no proof that Chicago Tongue is any worse than any other brand; but let it stand as the type of a Bad Thing.

A tragic, though perhaps not remarkable, case of Chicago Tongue came to my attention a few years ago ❀ It seems that a good-natured and somewhat talkative man remarked in a little Bohemian company that a certain artist, known to those present, wore trousers that bagged beautifully at the knee.

¶ A man and a woman in the party, who had a well-defined case of artistic jealousy toward the voluble man, repeated the remark to the artist who was re-

ferred to. The woman repeated the remark in the morning, and the little artist, of a sensitive and gentle type, with no capacity for horseplay, was just a trifle nettled. And when the man told him the same thing, with varying accent and inflection, in the afternoon, the matter took on a rather serious shape. A few days after, the artist met the gossipy woman again, and he questioned her as to what had been said. She repeated the remark about Pants, with gesticulations, genuflexions, shrugs and curves; and wishing to prove her friendship, warned the artist to be on his guard against those who were trying to unhorse him.

The more the artist thought of the matter, the more sure he was that this remark about his raiment really meant that he was a man devoid of taste, lacking in refinement

if not decency, and totally unfit to associate with ladies and gentlemen. Each time he met his alleged friends they pumped the poison into him. The matter preyed upon the man's mind until he could neither eat, sleep nor work. He sought out his traducer, insulted him openly, and got himself well chastised. His violence lost him his position, and a long season of dissipation and idleness followed, with golden moments lost and lost forever. The last I heard of the man and woman who had so unwittingly combined to work the ruin of their friend, they had turned on each other and were rending reputations to ragtime.

¶ The incident just mentioned sounds like an extreme case, but I hardly think it is, for the mischief-makers are at work in a similar way on every hand. Should the Angel

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Gabriel come to me and in a confidential undertone declare that a certain man, any man or any angel, was a vilifier of truth, a snare to the innocent, a pilferer, a sneak, a robber of graveyards, I would say: "Gabriel, you are troubled with incipient paranoia—I do not believe a word of what you say. The man you mention may not be a saint, but he is probably just as good as you or I. In fact, I think he must be very much like you, for we are never interested in either a person or a thing that does not bear some direct relationship to ourselves. Then, Gabriel, do you not remember the words of Bishop Begum, who said that no man applies an epithet to another that can not with equal truth be applied to himself?"

When we remember that hoarse, guttural cry of "Away with him—away with him!"

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and when we recall that some of the best and noblest men who have ever lived have been reviled and traduced, indicted and executed, by so-called good men—certainly men who were sincere—how can we open our hearts to the tales of discredit told of any man? The Billingsgate Calendar has been exhausted in attempts to describe Walt Whitman, and the lexicon of abuse has been used to hammer the heads of such men as Richard Wagner, Victor Hugo, Count Tolstoy and William Morris. Knowing these things, as every one does, shall we imitate folly, accept concrete absurdity for our counsel and guide, and take stock in Chicago Tongue?

The entire Salem Witchcraft insanity was nothing but a bad case of Chicago Tongue. Much of the martyrdom and bloodshed of

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the past can be traced directly to the same cause ♣ Nations have gone to war because some princeling has charged that a King stuck his tongue in his cheek and bit his thumb when another King was mentioned—nothing but Chicago Tongue!

Do not deceive yourself with the vain thought that women hold a monopoly on Chicago Tongue—men set them a pace in this direction that they can never hope to equal. The gossip of women is usually of a pattypan order, and childishly inconsequential compared with that of men.

One peculiarity of Chicago Tongue is that when it is passed along from one person to another it takes on ptomains. The original remark, uttered in a certain circle, may have been utterly devoid of poison; but when the repetition comes, in a different atmosphere,

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to different hearers, told by another man, the wit that once disinfected the thing is gone, and we have only dead, stale, tainted, unprofitable Chicago Tongue. And so you see how a person who repeats an unkind remark is probably doing a much greater mischief than the one who first voiced it. The man who repeats the story, and thus retails the poison, fails to supply the antidote. Let his name be anathema.

The basic principle of Chicago Tongue is jealousy. Jealousy is a social cancer, and grows by what it feeds upon. And its only food is Chicago Tongue—the more tainted the better.

I once knew three intelligent men who started giving one another small doses of Chicago Tongue, just by way of banter. The doses were increased, and in a short time all

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three began really to believe the stories they had been telling about a particular man of whom they were all more or less jealous. The cancer grew worse—the poison was at work—the trio held meetings behind locked doors to devise a way by which they could rid themselves of the supposed enemy. Assault and even murder were on their proposed program. They were wild, mad, stark, staring crazy on Chicago Tongue.

Luckily, a sane man discovered them in time, rapped them all vigorously over the head, separated them one from the other so they could no longer infect one another and pool their poison. Had this separation not been brought about, they surely would have all run down a steep place into the sea and been drowned, as was that herd of swine in the story, when the devils took the rudder.

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¶ If you are a man, beware how you let any devil get possession of your thinking apparatus. All devils use Chicago Tongue as bait. In way of strictest justice, though, it must be admitted that the dealers in Chicago Tongue are often innocent of wrong intent—that is, they do not know it is loaded. And when the boomerang comes back they are so surprised and grieved, and hurt! and they lift their hands in innocence and assume the pose of martyrdom.

Every large newspaper-office is the scene of a seething discontent. Peace is never declared—war reigns eternally. The public probably knows nothing of these plottings, counterplottings, curses, revilings, jealousies. The trouble is under the surface, just as much as are the loves, jealousies and heart-aches Below-Stairs. The impassive face of

Jeems, as he stands behind his master's chair, tells no tales.

It is the business of Jeems to see nothing—and everything—to hear nothing and repeat nothing. This if he is an artist in his line, for woe is Jeems if he brings the troubles of Below-Stairs to his master's ears, hoping thereby to find favor. For we hate the man who brings us trouble. In the olden time the messenger who brought tidings of disaster paid for his temerity with his head. On the other hand, blessed are the feet of him who bringeth glad tidings; he shall be rewarded with a necklace of gold, and he shall choose for his own from the fairest daughters of earth.

¶ I have spoken of the constant friction, faction and fight that exist in every newspaper-office. The truth of this is classic, but the

Underground Fight is everywhere where many men are gathered together in a like occupation. The Army is a hotbed of gossip. The Church is just as bad, and if a history of ecclesiastical rancor were written it would reveal an inferno of hate. And then the Sons of Æsculapius—every blessed one of them carries two or three hammers in his kipsy, this besides the one he has constantly in use. In fact, the Sons have formed themselves into one gigantic orchestra, and the only piece they play is the Anvil Chorus. ¶ Newspaper-offices are mentioned because there the pot seems to seethe and boil and spit with greatest glee. Hate, jealousy and rage continually feed the flame. Possibly the reason the fires of strife are never banked in a newspaper-office is because the men work under an intense nervous pressure. There is

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hot haste, and broken hours of rest, and always stimulants in way of tobacco, drink and drugs. Hence there are sharp answers, snubbings, marble faces, icy hands and bitter hearts; for despondency follows fast where good-cheer is reinforced with drink. Then beside, three-fourths of the matter printed in the average daily paper is a record of strife, and the workers become imbued with it. When a young man goes into a metropolitan newspaper-office as a reporter, he is given a table among forty other tables, where men with hats over their eyes write in feverish haste. Possibly here and there are men sitting in idleness with feet on the table. These men have done their tasks for the day and are watching the clock, waiting for the hour when they are allowed to leave. Our new man not

having much to do, gets to talking with one of these idlers—they go out together to get a drink. At the bar are other young men, and these are pointed out by the new-found friend, and jerky scraps of their history given, which seem to cover every crime in the calendar, and every phase of iniquity that brutish beings could devise. These so-called rogues are employees of the same concern that employs the Glib Informer. The Greenhorn remarks that they do not look so bad as that, and then he is reassured by facts and dates, and times and places. Should the Greenhorn stick to his new friend, he is quickly introduced into a clique and becomes a part of the hate and jealousy and cruel bickering of the place. He is pushed this way and that by those with stronger minds—or more experience—takes

part in plottings to oust certain men, not fully knowing why, and in a few months—a year perhaps—gets the Blue Envelope himself. He does not realize why he should be discharged, because he is not aware that hate and jealousy have inoculated his mind, and these things are beginning to reveal themselves in his work. The life of a man in any one metropolitan newspaper-office is very short. A year, say, is about the limit, when out he goes, penniless, to look for another job.

Should any man hold his place for two years or more, it is because he has religiously avoided mixing in factions; he has lent his ear to no plots; listened to no scandal; bore no bad news; gloried in no man's downfall. And when you find a veteran like, say, Chester S. Lord of *The Sun*, you know

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him to be a man who is above all idle gossip, bickering, quibbling and jealousy—who takes no part in schemes and plots, and who will not harken to them in others. The man who can not enjoy a good position without plotting to dislodge some one else, is laying a fuse that will cause himself to be lifted into space very shortly.

A ludicro-tragic feature of Chicago-Tongue is that those who deal in it most, always are full of grievances and wails because, they allege, other folks are talking about them. Indeed, this is their excuse for the constant use of the hammer—that some one is “knocking on them.” They mistake the sound of their own hammers for that of others. Any man who plots another’s undoing is digging his own grave. Every politician who voices innuendoes, and hints of base wrong

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about a rival, is blackening his own character. For a time he may seem to succeed, but the end is sure—it is defeat and death. All those plotters of the French Revolution who worked the guillotine in double shifts were at last dragged to the scaffold and pushed under the knife.

The hate we sow finds lodgment in our hearts, and the crop is nettles that Fate unrelentingly demands we shall gather.

They who live by the hammer shall perish by the hammer.

If you work in a department-store, a bank, a railroad-office, a factory, I beg of you, on your life, do not knock. Speak ill of no one, and listen to no idle tales. Whether the bitter things told are true or not, has no bearing on the issue. To repeat an unkind truth is just as bad as to invent a lie. If some one

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has spoken ill of me, do not be so foolish as to hope to curry favor by telling me of it. The "housecleaning" that occurs in the offices of companies and corporations every little while comes as a necessity. In a small establishment the head of the house can usually pooh-pooh the bickering out of the window; but in large concerns where many men are troubled with lint on the lungs, and everybody seems to have forgotten his work, just to "chew," then self-protection prompts the manager to clean house. It is the only thing he can do to preserve the life of the concern—out go the bacteria. It is said that James Gordon Bennett, owner of the *New York Herald*, comes home from Europe, only to discharge, peremptorily, every employee in his service. At regular intervals the place gets honeycombed with plot and counterplot,

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hate, jealousy and factional folly, and the master, having no time to sift the lies or sit in judgment on fishwife gossip, just cleans the coop from cellar to cockloft of good and bad alike.

It is very likely that if Mr. Bennett remained in personal charge of his estate he could keep the Chicago Tongue in subjection, but being away, hate permeates the structure and the Augean act is positively necessary.

I suppose there are institutions where Chicago Tongue is to a great degree obliterated, through the strong personality of the man at the helm. I have seen schools where the generous spirit of one man filled the whole place. But the man who is great enough to flavor a newspaper plant with love and patience has, I fear, not yet been found. And of this never for a moment doubt, that the man

who successfully manages a great railroad, bank, factory or other enterprise, is one who neither listens to, nor bears tales to any person of what this one says or does. He treats all with courtesy and fairness, and like the great and loving Lincoln, when his generals were accused, deducts seventy-five per cent from every accusation and throws the remainder in the wastebasket—actions alone count.

Where many men are employed, there are always some who are full of plots and of schemes for more pay, shorter hours or favors generally. They scheme to have one foreman “bounced” in order to have another man, who will help their cause, put in charge.

Should success follow their efforts, and the old foreman be replaced, the first move of the new man will probably be to discharge the conspirators who helped him.

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Men who conspire, and plot, and who lend a ready ear to the idea of a strike, are marked on every time-book for dismissal when the hour is ripe. And whenever you find a newspaper-man or a printer who spends half of his time looking for a job, you can rest assured that he is one who carries a large cargo of Chicago Tongue.

You can never stand in with the boss by telling him of those who are laggards. The only way you can win his favor is by setting the loafers a pace. He knows all about the loafers—God help him! for if he did not he could never successfully manage an institution.

No man can ever succeed who hopes to get a better position by defaming or dragging down the reputation of another. There is but one way to win, and that is to do your work well, and speak ill of no one, not even as a

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matter of truth. Any other course leads to
fears, tears, woful waste of life-force, and
oblivion. There is only one way to win the
favor of good men, and there is only
one way you can secure the smile of
God, and that is to do your work
as well as you can, and
be kind, and
BE KIND.

SO HERE ENDETH THE PREACHMENT ENTITLED
"CHICAGO TONGUE," WRITTEN BY FRA ELBERTUS,
AND DONE INTO A BOOK BY THE ROYCROFTERS,
AT THEIR SHOP IN EAST AURORA, NEW YORK



HERE can be no secret in life and morals, because Nature has provided that every beautiful thought you know and every precious sentiment you feel shall shine out of your face, so that all who are great enough may see, appreciate, know, understand and appropriate. You keep things only by giving them away.

